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# Rodeo Is Cruel Entertainment

DR. PEGGY W. LARSON\*

Many of us who have been raised with livestock are concerned about the inherently inhumane treatment of animals in the rodeo. It takes knowledge of livestock and awareness of the animal in the rodeo event to understand that these animals are being injured. I grew up on a farm/ranch with both dairy and beef cattle. Before I went to college, I was a rodeo competitor, riding the bucking horses on the Native American circuit. Women are not allowed to participate in the Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association (PRCA) rodeos.<sup>1</sup> After graduation from veterinary college, I cared for bucking horses in my large animal practice. During my career as a veterinarian, I became very concerned about the treatment of rodeo animals. Currently I am active in educating the public and working with local and state officials to change animal cruelty laws to protect rodeo animals.

Often rodeo promoters claim that rodeo is similar to ranching. This is not true. No rancher forces his horse to buck using a bucking strap around its flanks or drives blunt spurs into its shoulders. The rancher's horses are too valuable and too well-trained to risk injuring them by making them buck. Calves are herded into a corral and chased down a chute into a head gate where they are humanely held until they are treated or prepared for the feedlot. Calves are seldom roped. They are never choked and dragged as they are

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\* Peggy Larson, DVM, MS, JD, has used her degrees in medicine and law to help improve the treatment of all animals, regardless of size. Ms. Larson started the National Spay and Neuter Coalition and has consulted with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and *Inside Edition* to expose the abuse of horses. In addition, she consulted with *Hard Copy*, which is to air a two-part series concerning the maltreatment of animals.

1. See generally *Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association* (last modified Aug. 18, 1997) <<http://www.sanctum.com/rodeo/prca.htm>>.

in the rodeo because injuries cause the rancher to lose money.<sup>2</sup> Calves are the rancher's "cash crop." Furthermore, ranchers never ride bulls or wrestle steers.

Rodeo is not part of our heritage, as rodeo promoters also claim. Wild horses were caught and tamed; they were never forced to buck. Calves were indeed roped but not in a timed event. Ranch calves were seldom roped more than once or twice in their entire lives, whereas rodeo calves are roped repeatedly. Calves in practice pens are roped over and over until they are either too injured to use or exceed the weight limits. In a rodeo timed event, the calf is forced to run at top speed and then is stopped so violently by a rope around its neck that it is often jerked completely off its feet and slammed to the ground.<sup>3</sup> The timed events cause injury because time is more important than the welfare of the calf. No cowboy on a ranch ever rode a bull. Bulls were for breeding and were too valuable to risk injury. Also, cowboys did not wrestle steers because there was no need to do this in any ranch activity.

#### A. Injuries and Deaths in Rodeo Animals

The most serious rodeo injuries occur in the following events: 1) calf roping; 2) steer tripping; 3) steer wrestling; 4) wild horse "roundups;" and 5) horse tripping (Mexican style rodeos). In California alone, nine horses and cattle died in one year.<sup>4</sup> At the Calgary Stampede in 1995, three horses and one steer had to be destroyed due to their injuries. Already this year, five horses have died on rodeos. Two bucking horses were killed in the Denver rodeo in January of 1999. One chuck wagon racer was killed in the Calgary Stampede in July of 1999. One bucking horse was killed in Ottawa in August of 1999. One bucking horse was killed in Santa Barbara in August of 1999.

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2. The author has worked with ranch animals in her large animal veterinary practice and has had personal experience as a rodeo competitor.

3. See Interview with Eric Mills, Action for Animals, in Oakland, Cal.

4. Interview with C. G. Haber, DVM, by the Humane Society of the United States (1977).

Animals are also injured in the bucking events. Horses and bulls break their legs and injuries to the skin are common from bucking straps. They receive bite wounds from other horses; kick wounds from over-crowded corrals; and tears and abrasions as a result of their contact with trailers and chutes. Unfortunately, for the animal, the skin and hair covers bruises and broken ribs.

Dr. C. G. Haber, a veterinarian with thirty years experience as a meat inspector for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has documented evidence of injuries to rodeo animals. Dr. Haber states, "The rodeo folks send their animals to the packing houses where . . . I have seen cattle so extensively bruised that the only areas in which the skin was attached was the head, neck, legs and belly. I have seen animals with six to eight ribs broken from the spine that at times puncture the lungs. I have seen as much as two to three gallons of free blood accumulated under the detached skin."<sup>5</sup>

A career USDA meat inspection veterinarian, Dr. Robert Fetzner, Director of Slaughter Operations for Food Safety and Inspection (FSIS), stated in our phone conversation of September 9, 1998, "Lots of rodeo animals went to slaughter. I found broken ribs, punctured lungs, hematomas, broken legs, severed tracheas and the ligamenta nuchae were torn loose."<sup>6</sup> Torn ligamenta nuchae are broken necks. Dr. Fetzner saw the animals when he was the meat inspector at the Cheyenne, Wyoming slaughter plant.

Dr. Temple Grandin, who works with the cattle industry to improve humane treatment of animals, says a bucking horse that badly broke its front leg in the rodeo was shipped, with its leg dangling, across two states in a transport truck with other horses. It died before it could be humanely slaughtered. She also states that transport injuries and fighting are major causes of injuries in horses. Rodeo horses are constantly in transit.

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5. *See id.*

6. Interview with Dr. Robert Fetzner, Director of Slaughter Operations for Food Safety and Inspection (FSIS) for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (Sept. 9, 1998).

Dr. T. K. Hardy, a veterinarian who is also a calf roper, states that calf roping is an expensive sport. He says that two or three calves are injured in each practice session and have to be replaced.<sup>7</sup> Calves cost two hundred dollars and up, depending upon the market. One needs to recognize that every calf roper who competes in the rodeo must spend hours practicing. The practice calves are roped over and over again, until they are injured badly enough to be replaced.

Also at issue is how the bovine reacts to the electric prod. According to the Textbook of Veterinary Medicine, cattle are highly susceptible to electrical current.<sup>8</sup> Cows can detect electrical voltage when humans, dogs and horses cannot.<sup>9</sup> "Stray voltage" is a common occurrence in dairy barns. The cows are affected, but the humans cannot feel the electrical current.<sup>10</sup> Using the prod to enhance performance is against the PRCA rules.<sup>11</sup> Even they consider excessive use of the prod for enhancing performance to be inhumane.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the PRCA rodeos consistently use the prod inappropriately.<sup>13</sup>

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) no longer supports the Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association (PRCA) rules on humane treatment of rodeo animals. Furthermore, the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) of the AVMA will discuss at their fall meeting whether the AVMA will consider the following events inhumane: calf roping, steer roping, horse tripping, wild cow milking, chuck wagon races and wild horse roundups. Most of the injuries and

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7. See Interview with Dr. Temple Grandin, Professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine, in Colorado (Sept. 23, 1998).

8. See Rodeo: The Soul of the Frontier, NEWSWEEK, Oct. 12, 1972, at 27.

9. See BLOOD AND RADOSTITS, TEXTBOOK OF VETERINARY MEDICINE 552 (7th ed. 1989).

10. See *id.*

11. See generally *Humane Facts* (visited Nov. 18, 1998) <<http://www.nevadanet.com/renorodeo/facts.html>>. The Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association has a pamphlet publishing PRCA's Humane Facts. The use of electric prods is located in Rule 9.4. This rulebook can be purchased by calling (719) 593-8840, or ordered online at <http://www.prorodeo.com/html/3.publications.html>.

12. See generally *Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association* (last modified Aug. 18, 1997) <<http://www.sanctum.com/rodeo/prca.htm>>.

13. See Pittsburgh, Pa., Ordinance 29-1992, § 635.04-.08 (1992).

deaths in rodeo animals occur in these events. However, four bucking horses have already been killed in rodeos in 1999.<sup>14</sup>

## B. Laws and Ordinances Affecting Rodeo

### *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Ordinance*

One of the most effective ordinances against rodeo animal abuse is the Pittsburgh ordinance.<sup>15</sup> The ordinance bans electric prods or shocking devices; flank or bucking straps; wire tie-downs; and sharpened or fixed spurs or rowels. It also requires that an appropriate humane agency be notified at least fourteen calendar days prior to the rodeo.<sup>16</sup> The humane agents shall be provided access to the areas where the animals are held.<sup>17</sup> A licensed, practicing large animal veterinarian must be present during the entire rodeo and has complete authority over the treatment and utilization of the rodeo animals.<sup>18</sup> Penalties include a fine and/or imprisonment.<sup>19</sup>

### *Rhode Island*

A licensed large animal veterinarian must be present for the entire duration of the rodeo.<sup>20</sup> The veterinarian has complete authority over the injured animal.<sup>21</sup> The animal control officer must be notified that the rodeo is being held.<sup>22</sup> Calves can only be roped with "breakaway" ropes so that the calf is not subjected to a sudden stop or fall.<sup>23</sup>

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14. *See id.*

15. See AVMA Positions on Animal Welfare, Welfare of Animals in Spectator Sports, 1999 (visited Sept. 15, 1999) <<http://www.avma.com>>.

16. *See* Pittsburgh, Pa., Ordinance 29-1992, § 635.04-.08 (1992).

17. *See id.*

18. *See id.*

19. *See id.*

20. *See id.*

21. *See* R.I. GEN. LAWS § 4-20-4 (1997).

22. *See* R.I. GEN. LAWS § 4-20-5 (1997).

23. *See* R.I. GEN. LAWS § 4-20-2 (1997).

*Ohio*

No person can use, or cause to be used on any work animal any of the following devices: twisted wire snaffles; unpadded bucking straps; unpadded flank straps; electric or other prods; or similar devices.<sup>24</sup>

*California, New Mexico, Texas, Illinois*

California,<sup>25</sup> New Mexico<sup>26</sup> and Illinois<sup>27</sup> prohibit the horse tripping that is common in Mexican rodeos. The Texas State Attorney General ruled that the tripping of horses constitutes torture and is thus illegal under state anti-cruelty law.<sup>28</sup>

24. See R.I. GEN. LAWS § 4-20-7 (1997).

25. See OHIO REV. CODE ANN. § 959.20 (West 1998).

No person shall directly or indirectly or by aiding, abetting, or permitting the doing thereof put, place, fasten, use, or fix upon or to any work animal used or readied for use for a work purpose, twisted wire snaffles, unpadded bucking straps, unpadded flank straps, electric or other prods, or similar devices. The commission or performance of any act prohibited by this section is the act of the owner of the work animal upon or to which such act was done.

*Id.*

26. See CAL. PENAL CODE § 597g (West 1997).

(a) . . . Tripping a horse is an act that consists of the use of any wire, pole, stick, rope, or other object or apparatus whatsoever to cause a horse to fall or lose its balance. The poling or tripping of any horse is unlawful and any person violating the provisions of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor. (b) It is a misdemeanor for any person to intentionally trip or fell any equine by the legs by any means whatsoever for the purpose of entertainment or sport.

*Id.*

27. See N.M. STAT. ANN. § 30-18-11 (West 1997).

A. Unlawful tripping of an equine consists of intentionally using a wire, pole, stick, rope or any other object to cause an equine to lose its balance or fall, for the purpose of sport or entertainment. B. The provisions of Subsection A of this section do not apply to laying an equine down for medical or identification purposes. C. As used in this section, 'equine' means a horse, pony, mule, donkey or hinny. D. Whoever commits unlawful tripping of an equine is guilty of a misdemeanor. E. Whoever commits unlawful tripping of an equine that causes the maiming, crippling or death of the equine is guilty of a fourth degree felony.

*Id.*

28. See 510 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 70/5.01 (West 1998).

*Ft. Wayne, Indiana Ordinance*

No person shall conduct or allow rodeos within the city limits.<sup>29</sup>

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Horse poling or tripping. (a) As used in this Section: 'Pole' means to use a method of training a horse that consists of (i) forcing, persuading, or enticing a horse to jump so that one or more of its legs contacts an obstruction consisting of any kind of wire, or a pole, stick, rope, or other object in which is embedded brads, nails, tacks, or other sharp points or (ii) raising, throwing, or moving a pole, stick, wire, rope, or other object against one or more legs of a horse while it is jumping an obstruction so that the horse, in either case, is induced to raise its leg or legs higher in order to clear the obstruction.

'Trip' means to use a wire, rope, pole, stick, or other object or apparatus to cause a horse to fall or lose its balance. (b) No person may knowingly pole or trip a horse by any means for entertainment or sport purposes. (c) This section does not prohibit the lawful laying down of a horse for medical or identification purposes.

*Id.*

29. See TEX. PENAL CODE ANN. § 42.09 (West 1997).

(a) A person commits an offense if he intentionally or knowingly: (1) tortures or seriously overworks an animal; (2) fails unreasonably to provide necessary food, care, or shelter for an animal in his custody; (3) abandons unreasonably an animal in his custody; (4) transports or confines an animal in a cruel manner; (5) kills, injures, or administers poison to an animal, other than cattle, horses, sheep, swine, or goats, belonging to another without legal authority or the owner's effective consent; (6) causes one animal to fight with another; (7) uses a live animal as a lure in dog race training or in dog coursing on a racetrack; or (8) trips a horse. (b) It is a defense to prosecution under this section that the actor was engaged in bona fide experimentation for scientific research. (c) For purposes of this section: (1) 'Animal' means a domesticated living creature and wild living creature previously captured. 'Animal' does not include an uncaptured wild creature or a wild creature whose capture was accomplished by conduct at issue under this section. (2) 'Trip' means to use an object to cause a horse to fall or lose its balance. (d) An offense under this section is a Class A misdemeanor, except that the offense is a state jail felony if the person has previously been convicted two times under this section. (e) It is a defense to prosecution under Subsection (a)(5) that the animal was discovered on the person's property in the act of or immediately after injuring or killing the person's goats, sheep, cattle, horses, swine, or poultry and that the person killed or injured the animal at the time of this discovery. (f) It is a defense to prosecution under Subsection (a)(8) that the actor tripped the horse for the purpose of identifying the ownership of the horse or giving veterinary care to the horse.

*Id.* See also 510 ILL. COMP. STAT. ANN. 70/5.01 (West 1998).



*Baltimore City, Maryland*

This ordinance prohibits the use of any equipment that would/can cause physical pain or injury.<sup>30</sup> Curb bits (commonly used in Western saddle horses), twisted wire and snaffles (bits), and spurs are not permitted.<sup>31</sup> Horses cannot be beaten or prodded to maintain a fast gait.<sup>32</sup>

*Baltimore County, Maryland*

No person shall beat, torment, overload, overwork or otherwise abuse any animal or cause, instigate or permit any calf roping or other combat between animals and humans.<sup>33</sup> Electrical prods or shocking devices are prohibited at rodeos and similar events except for the purpose of herding or managing the livestock.<sup>34</sup>

*Alameda County, California*

A veterinarian and an animal control officer must be in attendance throughout the duration of every event that uses animals.<sup>35</sup> The veterinarian cannot be a contestant or participate in any of the animal events.<sup>36</sup> The Animal Control Office and the Alameda County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) shall be notified no less than fourteen days in advance of the rodeo.<sup>37</sup> The notification must

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30. Fort Wayne, Indiana, Ordinance as compiled by the Humane Society of the United States (Nov. 1996); *See generally Humane Society of the United States* (visited Nov. 18, 1998) <<http://www.husus.org/>>.

31. Baltimore City, Maryland Ordinance as compiled by the Humane Society of the United States (Nov. 1996); *See generally Humane Society of the United States* (visited Nov. 18, 1998) <<http://www.husus.org/>>.

32. *See id.*

33. *See id.*

34. Baltimore County, Maryland Ordinance as compiled by the Humane Society of the United States (Nov. 1996); *see generally Humane Society of the United States* (visited Nov. 18, 1998) <<http://www.husus.org/>>.

35. *See id.*

36. Alameda County, California Ordinance as compiled by the Humane Society of the United States (Nov. 1996); *See generally Humane Society of the United States* (visited Nov. 18, 1998) <<http://www.husus.org/>>.

37. *See id.*

contain a written description of the animal events and a copy of the rules governing the events shall be submitted.<sup>38</sup>

### C. Bills Which Have Been Proposed

#### *Maryland*

A person may not use an inhumane device at a rodeo.<sup>39</sup> Inhumane device means any chemical, mechanical, electrical, or manual instrument used to agitate, activate, stimulate, or move an animal through torture, torment or cruelty.<sup>40</sup> This includes: electric prods or other shocking devices; whips; clubs; sharpened spurs; and any form of rope, wire, or strap designed to irritate the sexual organs of an animal.<sup>41</sup> A licensed veterinarian must be in attendance throughout the rodeo.<sup>42</sup> He or she cannot be a contestant.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Hawaii*

A person commits the offense of cruelty to rodeo animals if the person induces animal performance through the use of any practice or technique, or any chemical, mechanical, electric or manual device that will cause or is likely to cause physical injury, torment or suffering or uses the following devices that are specifically prohibited at all rodeos: electric prods or shocking devices; flank or bucking straps; wire tie-downs; sharpened spurs; and bullwhips.<sup>44</sup>

### D. Commentary

Rodeo is so ingrained in our culture that it is difficult to eradicate. I believe that the only effective procedure to limit or abolish rodeo is the enactment of laws and ordinances. Pittsburgh has not had a rodeo in the city since the ordinance was enacted.

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38. *See id.*

39. *See id.*

40. Maryland proposed bill as compiled by the Humane Society of the United States (Nov. 1996); *See generally Humane Society of the United States* (visited Nov. 18, 1998) <<http://www.husus.org/>>.

41. *See id.*

42. *See id.*

43. *See id.*

44. *See id.*